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ABSTRACT

Honors programs are not a major part of the community college curriculum due to the colleges' focus on providing access to nontraditional students, as well as the feeling of some community college educators that honors programs are inherently elitist. A 1975 survey found that only 47 of 644 responding institutions had formalized honors programs. A majority (73%) of the institutions, however, reported having informal honors elements, including honors classes, guest speakers, credit by examination, achievement-based financial aid, honor rolls, honor societies, and honors advisory committees. Different types of honors program activities in use at community colleges include: (1) special course sections, which cover course material in greater depth; (2) in-class honors options, allowing students to complete extra work for honors credit; (3) interdisciplinary instruction, providing courses that cover two or more disciplines; (4) honors colloquia; and (5) special activities, including social events and opportunities for special research. Typically, criteria for entering honors programs include students' grade point averages (GPA's) and their scores on standardized tests. Once in honors programs, students must maintain a minimum GPA. The little research that exists on the characteristics of community college honors students suggests that honors curricula must be geared toward vocational and non-traditional students, as well as traditional transfer students. (MAB)

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Community College Honors Programs

Honors programs are not a major part of the community collegecurriculum. In the attempt to provide access to a wide range of non-traditional students, community colleges as a whole have inadvertently paid little attention to the academically gifted sudent. Furthermore, some community college educators have objected to what they feel is the inherent elitism of college honors programs.Olivas (1975) notes, for example, that uneasiness about elitism may be responsible, at least in part, for the lack of research on community college honors curricula (p. 1). Nonetheless, Olivas also observes that

> the development of honors opportunities for gifted students in two-year colleges is a ... fledgling attemptto educate one constituency in an extremely heterogeneous student population. The mandate of two-year colleges to cultivate all available talent by extending additional opportunity to all who seek it suggests that there are no entangling precedents to preclude the development of honors programs if they be warranted'' (p. 12).

Indeed, since 1975, community college honors programs have received growing attention. Friedlander (1982) notes several reasons for this:

> -the growing number of community college students who can benefit from such programs;
>
> -enhanced college efforts to strengthen the quality of academic programs, particularly in the area of general education;
>
> -the recognition that honors programs help attract and retain outstanding students and faculty, and;
>
> -the fact that honors programs can enhance the college's public image and scholastic reputation.

Thus, honors programs serve the dual purpose of meeting the needs of a significant segment of the two-year college student body and of meeting increased public demand for educational quality.

HOW ARE COMMUNITY COLLEGE HONORS PROGRAMS STRUCTURED?

In his 1975 survey of the nation's community colleges, Olivas found that only 47 of the 644 responding institutions had honors programs with formalized academic and administrative structures. Thevast majority (73%), however, indicated that ``while they did not haveformalized academic and administrative honors programs, they did havehonors elements for those students with demonstrated superior ability''(p. 4). Such elements include honors classes, guest speakers, credit by examination, achievement-based financial aid, honor rolls, honor societies, and honors advisory committees. Olivas also found that 125 of institutions had no honors elements at all.

WHAT TYPES OF HONORS PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES ARE IN USE AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

Since Olivas' study, no comprehensive national surveys of community college honors programs have been conducted. Research undertaken by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges in 1982, however, details the honors activities at six large, urban

community college districts (Friedlander, 1982; ``Transfer, Honors,and Excellence...,'' 1982). These activities include the Dean's Scholar Program at Wright College in Chicago, the Advanced Arts and Sciences Program at Chicago's Loop College, the Honor's Scholar Program at Richland College (Dallas Community College District), and additional honors programs at West Los Angeles College (Los Angeles Community College District), at the Maricopa Community College District in Arizona, and at Miami-Dade Community College in Florida. Several approaches are used by these colleges to meet the needs of the ablest and most highly motivated students.

-SPECIAL COURSE SECTIONS. A common approach to honors instruction is the development of special sections for general education and occupational courses. In these special sections,honors students might read additional primary material, cover subject material in greater depth, or write additional papers. Special sections are usually small classes that allow students to work with others of similar ability.

-IN-CLASS HONORS OPTIONS. Colleges without separate honors courses often allow students to earn honors credit in a course by completing additional activities. In some cases, instructors add an honors addendum to the course syllabus or require students o complete a course evaluation plan (CEP). The CEP is a contractual agreement requiring the student to perform special assignmentsthat might include library research, field projects, or class presentations. The CEP normally specifies how the student's work will be evaluated.

-INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION. Some colleges provide honors students with special interdisciplinary , team-taught courses that cover two or more disciplines. A similar approach is the provision of a cross-disciplinary set of concurrent honors courses. Att Miami-Dade Community College, for example, honors students majoring in science can take a set of courses covering the history of science, English composition, and the humanities. The courses carry nine credits and are taught by an interdisciplinary team of professors.

-HONORS COLLOQUIA. Some colleges coordinate the

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honors program with a visiting lecture series. In one approach to this coordination, a special honors course is built around a series of lectures given by distinguished scholars who are invited to the campus. In anotherapproach, honors students enrolled in different courses attend guest lectures as part of their course work. Guest lectures also conduct special seminars, workshops, and conferences for honors students.

-SPECIAL ACTIVITIES. Besides actual course work, honors programs often include social activities, recognition banquets, and opportunities for special research. This research may be part of the work prepared for a special honors seminar; it may also take the form of an independent study project that is coordinated by faculty advisors.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF FACULTY IN HONORS PROGRAMS?

Most instructors participating in honors programs at the urban community colleges do so on a voluntary basis. Instructors interested in converting a course to an honors course usually submit a proposal to the academic dean, to a curriculum committee, and to a college honors committee. At some colleges individual faculty members also serve as mentors for honors students whose interests correspond with their own.

WHAT ABOUT ADMISSIONS CRITERIA?

Typically, students entering an honors program must have (1) an ACT score of 25 or more or a combined score of 1100 on the SAT and 2) a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.5 in high school or college. In addition, some colleges require prospective students to undergo an interview with members of the college's honors committee. Usually, students are required to maintain a minimum grade point average and to complete a specified number of of honors courses to remain in the program.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HONORS STUDENTS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

There is little research on the characteristics of community college honors students. In one study that has been conducted (Day, 1982), the Maricopa Community College District found that of its 194 honors students, 65.5% were women, most were younger than the district population as a whole, and only 12 were non-white. Although 50% of the honors students were interested in obtaining transfer credit, 28.4% were interested in occupational programs and 21.6% were interested in the general education curriculum.

The Maricopa data point to the necessity of gearing honors programs to non-traditional and vocational students, as well as to traditional transfer students. It is on this point -the necessity of serving all students in the comprehensive curriculum - that community college honors programs will differ from those at four-year institutions.

ADDITIONAL READINGS.

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Further information on honors programs or on any other topic related to community college administration or education can be found through manual or computer searches of the ERIC database. For information about searching ERIC, consult a librarian or contact the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges, 8118 Math-Sciences Building; UCLA Los Angeles, California 90024.

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